Jim Thomas Wants to Make Industry Safe for Democracy

British Labor Man Who Stands Between Extreme Left and Extreme Right Tells Us How It Can Be Done

By Merryle Stanley Rukeyser

IN THE worldwide shifting of the political centre of gravity in recent times new figures have emerged as national leaders. Spokesmen for loyal labor have been transmuted into powerful statesmen. Particularly in Europe, where everything seems to be in a state of flux, bankers and captains of industry are mingling more freely than ever before with trade union officials, to whom they are looking for an interpretation of the drift. Men of large vision, who by sheer bigness were buoyed to the top of the non-revolutionary labor movement, are to-day perhaps the greatest menace in the world—to Bolshevism.

Such a man is Jim Thomas, a leader of the moderate element in the British Labor party, standing between the extreme Left and the extreme Right. James H. Thomas is now in the United States conferring privately with makers of public opinion in this country. He came, he said, purely for personal reasons, to visit relatives and build up his health, which was constantly under a strain during the years that Great Britain faced in the field the common enemy of the world.

We Are Honored

Mr. Thomas from the outset of the war struggled to harness the full energy of labor behind the war machine of Britain, and now, in the wake of military victory, the whole nation is ready to listen attentively to his proposals for the building of a better state. For a man who has dedicated his career to the working class movement Mr. Thomas has already made great progress, but few who know him well believe that he has yet attained the peak. Some well informed people feel that the next government of Great Britain will be a labor government. If it is, in the opinion of one of America's foremost financiers who has been studying the British situation intensively, Jim Thomas will be the next Prime Minister. He turned down an offer to be Minister of Labor at a salary of £5,000 a year in the Lloyd George coalition Cabinet, on the ground that he would be more helpful to the people he represented as a member of the Opposition.

Mr. Thomas was seen the other day at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. He has been declining all invitations to make public addresses during his stay in this country, and was resolved to abstain from being interviewed. Mr. Thomas was, however, prevailed upon to give a message from British labor to American labor and from the British people as a whole to the American people. He declared that this statement through The Tribune will be the only public one that he will make while on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. He will leave in a few days for Canada.

For More Democracy

The Britisher overflowed with ideas on the subject which he dwells on with passionate zeal—a programme for bringing greater democracy into industry. The sturdy leader, a man of middle height, forty-four years old, is general secretary and head of the National Union of Railwaymen, which has more than 400,000 members; treasurer of the Triple Alliance (of railwaymen, transport workers and miners), which has a membership exceeding 1,500,000, and is a Member of Parliament. A large forehead and blazing brown eyes suggest the intellectual fibre of the man. In his facial expression kindliness fuses with seriousness. He has a brown mustache and wears a bow tie. He speaks with a sweeping earnestness.

"What changes do you observe in the United States since you were here two years ago as labor member of the Balfour mission to this country?" Mr. Thomas was asked.

"Although I recognize," he replied, "that it is not the duty of any foreigner, no matter how disinterested, to interfere with or dogmatize on the internal affairs of another country, I nevertheless clearly observe two broad changes since my last visit here. First, I see a very marked change in the genuine desire on the part of employers to recognize the principle of collective bargaining through trade unions. In the second place, I perceive a fast growing sentiment in favor of an independent labor party in this country."

Labor's Weakness

Returning to Great Britain after visiting America two years ago, Mr. Thomas remarked that, in so far as labor suffers any disadvantages in the United States, it was largely attributable to its failure to wield its inherent political power through the formation of a separate party. He said the attempt to separate the industrial sphere from the political was a mistake, tending to make trade unionists "lobbyists" when they came into contact with the legislative bodies.

"I deplore," Mr. Thomas added, in surveying present conditions in this country, "a tendency to cause mischief between the United States and Great Britain, but I am equally satisfied from talking to the people I have met here that the effort does not represent the best element, or even a majority of the people. The ties that bind these two nations are not surface ties, but long standing ties, historical, geographical, yes, blood ties. And it should be remembered that no two nations brought such pure idealism and unselfishness into the war as the United States and Great Britain, and that no one nation gave so much blood for no material or selfish ends, but that right might triumph over might, as Great Britain.

"It is not generally realized that a million of our best blood passed into the Great Unknown during the war, or that our casualties exceeded 4,000,000, or that our national debt increased £7,000,000,000. All this was in addition to the sacrifice of living on rations and all the other war-time restrictions. A nation that can do those things for the principle of right requires no defence.

British Appreciation

"The British people appreciate warmly all that America did. They understand what noble ideals inspired her people. While I cannot and have no desire to interfere with mere party politics and political warfare such as exists in all countries, I very fervently feel that neither party politics, nor party advantage, nor personal ambition should interfere with the cementing of that friendship so essential to the world's welfare.

"Eastern Europe is in turmoil. The danger is as real to you as it is to us, and, if the peace of the world is to be restored, no two nations can contribute to that end as much as the United States and Great Britain. And, if militarism is to be permanently crushed and civilization saved, a remedy for war must be found.

"At the present time, in my solemn judgment, there is no alternative to the league of nations—not a league of kings, nor of presidents, nor of cabinets, but a league of free peoples, enabled as citizens to give expression to their sentiment and by their common interest and duty to humanity to preserve the peace of the world."

The Trend to Labor

The labor leader was requested to say whether he thought the next government of Great Britain would be a labor government. "Many people," he answered, "look with confidence on the prospect that a labor government will succeed the coalition government. I would hardly care to dogmatize about that, however, inasmuch as I might be considered a biassed witness. All I can say is that the signs point in that direction.

"There seems to be far more apprehension in this country than at home of the probable results of a labor government in Great Britain. I suppose the explanation is that the British people know us best. We are neither bandits nor robbers, anxious to confiscate property and pull down the old bases of society. Our party is made up of men trained to face responsibilities, who recognize that justice is an essential feature of any political programme. No party can exist unless actuated by and influenced in all its decisions by the high moral principle of justice and equity to all."

The discussion then turned to the particular phase of the British labor situation about which Mr. Thomas is most concerned. He was asked what changes in the status of the British railway workers have been made since the signing of the armistice, and also to clarify the present state of affairs, which some weeks ago seemed likely to bring on a general strike.

The Truce Observed

Answering the first part of the inquiry, he said: "There has been no change. When the war broke out the British railway workers signed a truce not to take part in or create any industrial dispute while the war lasted. That truce has been observed, and since the signing of the armistice negotiations which have taken place resulted in the war conditions of labor being guaranteed for a period of twelve months. The guarantee expires in December of this year.

"Negotiations are now under way to determine what the situation will be after that time. It has been clearly recognized that it is difficult to legislate permanently for abnormal conditions which may fluctuate greatly when normal conditions are restored. These negotiations are being guaranteed on the one side by representatives of the railway companies and on the other by representatives of the men. When I return I shall resume charge of the workers' case."

The next query related to the objective of the railway workers.

"It is difficult to be specific," Mr. Thomas rejoined, "in view of the changing conditions, but I can say that the workers demand—and rightly—a fair share of the fruits of their labor. No one can deny that the pre-war conditions of the railway workers were not only bad but also a sad reflection on our social life. That they will be altered and never revert to the old way again is the considered judgment of both sides."

"Do you think the railroads of Great Britain will be permanently nationalized?" was asked.

"It appears to me," he asserted, without hesitation, "that the introduction in Parliament of the new transportation bill, which provides for coördination of the steamships, railroads and roads, renders the nationalization of the railroads inevitable."

Agrees With Vanderlip

Mr. Thomas was further asked whether he agreed with the statement of Frank A. Vanderlip that Great Britain would no longer profit in international trade from the differential in costs which came from the payment of low wages, and if so, why.

"I do most heartily agree," he said. "I heard and also read Mr. Vanderlip's first address in this country after his return from Europe and thought that it was not only a courageous speech, but also that it was very necessary that some one should say what he did, because we tend to live in a fool's paradise, and to do that is dangerous at this time above all others.

"As to why the differential will no longer exist, I may say for a good and simple reason that should be common to all countries. If men living in hovels and slums, working under sweated conditions, were willing to sacrifice their lives for their country, a natural corollary must be that the country must be made worth living in. If love of country means giving up one's life for it then that country must be made worthy of such heroic sacrifice.

"I have watched with interest and anxiety the inevitable effects that followed the world war. The war was fought in the interest of democracy and justice. Untold sacrifices were made in blood and treasure, not by any one section of the community, not by any one class or creed, but by all elements in the nation. The viewpoint—that is your word, not ours—of the British workers is that if justice was desirable in world affairs and nations resorted even to war to attain it, justice is also to be sought in industrial matters and the objective of the labor movement can be summarized in that sentence."

Toward Industrial Peace

Mr. Thomas continued in a few brief phrases to crystallize his views on the means of attaining industrial peace. The great desideratum of the labor movement, he feels, should be harmony, and, although one of the prime movers in the formation of the Triple Alliance in 1912, he has always insisted that, with the power that comes from organization, there must be responsibility.

"Just as capital has privileges, so too it has responsibilities," he said. And his theory of industrial relations is of more than academic interest, because of his dominant position in the trade union movement. "Just as labor equally has power as a result of numbers, so equally it has responsibilities and it appears to me that these factors can only be determined by a frank recognition of the facts by both sides. The only adequate expression can be given through the organized bodies on both sides.

"Collective bargaining in our country to-day is not only recognized, but is the accepted medium of dealing with industrial matters, and I cannot conceive of any other method more adaptable to any country.

"In my judgment, collective bargaining is the only antidote to Bolshevism, which is the forerunner of revolution. We believe that in any civilized community and any well organized state of society the greatest power lies in an educated democracy which gives expression to its thoughts and aspirations through its collective machinery in the industrial world and by the intelligence it displays at the ballot box.

"And in grappling with the current problems of the world, which are more precarious than generally anticipated, it is the duty of the best elements on all sides to recognize this fact. Revolutions, if not bred, are certainly fed by injustice and starvation, and the economic conditions of Europe to-day are such as have all the germs of a very grave upheaval in them. How far we will be able to check a bloody war will depend upon a recognition of the factors I have mentioned."

Mr. Thomas is one of the idols of the workingmen of Britain. His origin was humble and his rise was retarded by innumerable obstacles. "The life of J. H. Thomas has been outlined from his early days as a chemist's errand boy in Newport to his election as the representative of Derby in Parliament," J. F. Moir Bussy, his official biographer and personal friend, says in a sketch of his career, "thence to his rise to the position of general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen and, onward, to a period at which he was able to refuse a seat in the present Cabinet—a decision taken with rare independence and in the belief that he would be able to serve the working classes (one of whose champions he is) much better as an independent member of Parliament than if trammelled by office.

Thorns in His Path

"Men do not rise as he has done without merit. His old grandmother, who had the care of his infancy and early youth, could have testified to there being no silver spoon in his mouth when he was born; his old schoolmaster could have answered for it that in the dawn of his labor activities he was rewarded with more kicks than ha'pence, and I, who have known him for more than twenty-two years, can vouch for the fact that his path has been more beset with thorns than garlanded with roses.

"One thing appears to me certain, and it is that just as the young engine driver on the Great Western Railway was offered promotion by his company, and, with it, the chance of blossoming forth into a railway 'official,' with a future which might have culminated in the managerial sanctum, so social position and emolument will never tempt him from the rut of usefulness to the working classes.

"He refused the Great Western advances in the belief that he could do more good to the men in the ranks. Money was not his ambition in life then, nor is it now when he can find in his heart to reject a seat in the Cabinet with all the power and financial attractions which it would bring in its train. I am so certain of my case that I will enlist in the rather discredited army of (modern) prophets and declare as a sure thing that whatever sphere of usefulness Jim Thomas may be called upon to occupy in the days to come, or whatever honors may be conferred upon him, his love for his own people and his passionate desire to improve the lot of the worker will be the governing factor of all his decisions."

James H. Thomas

Strong "moderate" in the British Labor party, now in this country

Signs, He Says, Point to Next Government in Britain Being a Labor Government, Succeeding the Coalition

Why Justice Hughes Believes in Russian Relief

ONE result of the upheaval in Russia holds alarming possibilities for the future. Millions of children in their impressionable years have been wandering the streets of Russian cities, gaining their idea of life and government from the outrages and violence perpetrated upon themselves and their parents. Lack of education in the past has been largely responsible for the present state of affairs, and what schools there are have been thrown into chaos. In many cases the Bolsheviki are teaching the children their own doctrines and little else.

Mme. Catherine Breshkovsky, the "Little Grandmother of the Revolution," known throughout the world because of her gallant efforts to educate the Russian peasants, has just started back to Russia.

The Catherine Breshkovsky Russian Relief Fund, 381 Fourth Avenue, New York City, is collecting funds for the building of schools. One shipment of clothes, including garments for babies, already has left for Russia.

The fund has the support of many prominent Americans, including ex-Governor Hughes and Henry Morgenthau. Its president is Lawrence F. Abbott, president of the Outlook Company. The members of the committee feel that Americans can do much toward encouraging the more stable elements of the Russian people by taking care of the young and helpless. Justice Hughes, who is one of those supporting Mme. Breshkovsky's work, was asked why he was interested in Russian Relief. He said:

Doomed

"The Bolsheviki are bound to fail. Their programme is founded upon an economic fallacy and their collapse will be one of the greatest benefits that can come out of the war. It will be a demonstration clear to all the world that class hatred never can serve as a foundation for a prosperous state.

"It is of the utmost importance for the future of humanity that this demonstration be as clear as possible. We must do what we can to encourage the more stable elements in Russia and allow them to feel that the other nations of the world will support and befriend them. But on the other hand, we must not do anything to encourage the Bolsheviki, or interfere in such a way that they can lay their failures to any cause except the inherent falseness of their own philosophy.

"The end of the Bolsheviki will be due chiefly to an economic collapse. This collapse is imminent. Prosperity depends upon production. In order to avoid poverty, and even starvation, and to make any social progress possible, society must rely upon the gains of production. The Bolsheviki cannot meet this condition. They have, indeed, in a large degree paralyzed manufacturing and transportation, and this in a country with unlimited resources. This result is inevitable because capital and labor, intelligence and physical strength, must work together or all in the community will suffer. The country can no more be successfully ruled by the so-called proletariat alone than it can secure happiness and prosperity under the government of a small privileged class who exploit the worker.

"There always will be those whose lives have not been satisfactory and who believe that if they themselves could only rule the world their troubles would vanish. There always will be those who for one reason or another wish to overturn the economic structure of civilized life. It is easy to go to the man who works with his hands and tell him that if he but had the power to rule alone, he would be richer and more comfortable. Some will believe it, and will not hear the appeal to reason. To such a man nothing will suffice to prove that he is wrong except to see with his own eyes the result of such a revolution. That is why the experiment now going on in Russia is so important. Class warfare has been carried to its extreme, and future generations will have before them a picture of desolation and suffering which will help to prevent a repetition of such a tragedy.

"While the Bolsheviki profess to hold the tenets of socialism, their doctrines are based upon class hatred, class warfare and the elimination of the essential bases for trained thinking and trained leadership. The Bolsheviki do not represent the Russian people. I believe that they are in a minority, and a small minority at that. Because the Russian peasant has lived for generations in ignorance, his simplicity and inertia have allowed a small group to gain control. There must be no hint that the other nations of the world will recognize the Bolsheviki, and there must be encouragement for capable leaders among the Russian people who are striving to provide a reasonable government.

Suffering Meanwhile

"While the Bolsheviki government is destined to fall, in the mean time innocent peasants, their wives and children are being reduced to the most abject poverty and many thousands are upon the verge of starvation. What schools there are have been closed in many parts of Russia, and in the territory controlled by the Bolsheviki the children are dependent for their education upon those who believe only in class hatred and class vengeance. One of the most crying needs of Russia to-day is education. It is almost impossible to form a modern state from an illiterate people. America can do no better for Russia, and indeed for the workmen of all the world, than to educate the children to become self-respecting and intelligent citizens.

"There are 4,000,000 children whose fathers were killed fighting for the Allies upon the eastern front, or have died since in the misery that has followed the Bolshevik rule. Many of the mothers have died also from starvation and neglect. These children are at the mercy of the Bolsheviki or of neighbors little less miserable than themselves. Mme. Breshkovsky wishes to gather them together in towns and settlements and educate them as a nucleus for still further work among the peasant children. It is only a drop in the bucket, when we contemplate the enormous population and the great misery of Russia, but it is a beginning, and it will be an encouragement to those who are struggling to save their country to know that America is not failing Russia in her hour of need."

Defining Anarchy for Henry Ford

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greatest Americans, was it not?—Emerson, Whittier, Bronson, Abbott, William James, John Fiske, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell held it?

A.—Yes, those men were of about the same school of thought.

Q.—Were they anarchists because they believed them?

A.—No.

The famous Biglow Papers, written during the Civil War, were referred to. Mr. Reeves refused to assume, or allow his questioner to assume, that they were written during the Civil War, but said they were written during the Mexican War, that James Russell Lowell was greatly opposed to the war, which was generally considered by New Englanders as well as by Mr. Lowell as brought on for the benefit of the slave owners in an attempt to extend the slavery traffic; and in the Biglow Papers Mr. Lowell assailed the government for going into the war of conquest against Mexico, which, said Professor Reeves, it practically was.

Poets Consulted

"The United States Congress recognized that war existed," said Mr. Reeves, "and by the act of Mexico. We did not declare war upon Mexico. We recognized a state of war and entered upon it because Americans had been killed by Mexicans on this side of the Rio Grande, and it was while this war was going on that Lowell uttered sentences that war was murder and in opposition to the very war we were carrying on at that time. Lowell put the words into the mouth of Hosea Biglow."

Lines from Alfred Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" were quoted—

"When the war drums throb no longer
And the battle flags are furled;
In the parliament of man,
The federation of the world."

—which Mr. Reeves announced contained nothing anarchistic.

"It is to be hoped the federation of the world—that is, the federation of the nations—would make war unlikely. That was Tennyson's idea, and I think held by many at the present time," was the answer.

"Anarchy means literally without government. A large number of American thinkers, such men as Emerson, Whittier, Thoreau, Tom Fisk, Bronson Olcott and others, represented the same school of thought. Not anarchists but transcendentalists."

Another interesting bit of dialogue:

Q.—Do you know old Samuel Johnson?

A.—Yes. He published a dictionary.

Q.—Did he once say, "Patriotism is the last resort of a scoundrel"?

A.—Yes; he made a number of striking sayings.

Q.—Well, is the statement true—that scoundrels often cloak their designs by a pretence of patriotism, just as they sometimes do with religion?

A.—Yes; it is not infrequently true that patriotism is thus abused.

Professor Reeves was asked by Attorney Lucking whether or not the following language taken from one of Mr. Ford's utterances was considered by him as anarchistic:

"If I had my way I'd throw every ounce of the war into the sea, strip the uniforms of the soldiers and sailors of their senseless insignia and make all of their apparel fit for honest toil. I would beach every warship and dissemble every rifle and gun, and convert the salvage into useful commercial implements, to be used for the benefit and upbuilding of mankind."

"It might be all right to believe if everybody did it," said Mr. Reeves, "but I think it would be a fool thing to do if we were the only ones to do it, especially if Germany were in the attitude she was at the time—in 1915. If all mankind were perfect, if the lion could lie down with the lamb, I should say I should agree to it. But in the condition in which the world was in 1915—that is quite different."

Emma Goldman

Emma Goldman was not overlooked. From her writings were culled many choice paragraphs, read to Mr. Reeves and his opinion asked. Her definition of anarchism was in part as follows:

"Anarchism, philosophy of a new social order, based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law. The theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful as well as unnecessary."

That, admitted the learned professor, was a fair definition of anarchism.

The Goldman definition continued with:

"Religion, the dominion of the human mind; property, the dominion of human needs; government, the dominion of human conduct, represents a stronghold of man's enslavement, and all the horrors it entails. Religion—how it dominates man's mind, how it humiliates and degrades his soul! God is everything, man is nothing, says religion. But out of that nothing God has created a kingdom so despotic, so tyrannical, so cruel, so terrible that naught but gloom and fear and blood have ruled the world since God began. Anarchism arouses man to rebellion against this black monster." . . .

But Professor Reeves would not admit that the definition by Goldman was a fair statement of anarchism—held by some but not all well recognized anarchists. Tolstoy, for instance, who first, last and all time based his whole scheme upon Christianity. Bakounin, on the contrary, held as Goldman did. He was a Russian, a violent anarchist. Proudhon would not accept it as a definition. In 1860 he changed, and in his latter discourses said property was robbery. Later in life this view, too, was greatly modified. His original idea was that an hour's work, regardless of what it was, should have the same value. Thus a man working an hour on the streets should be entitled to the same reward as a skilled mechanic or lawyer.

"What is needful in the support of the government in an emergency such as we have just passed through in the last two or three years, to enable the government to exercise its functions in the way of handling its armed forces?" asked Attorney Stevenson.

"There is only one way that the government can defend itself," was the answer, "and that is by the use of force, and it can only use force if it can coerce or make or require the individual to render service to the state, and anarchists deny the right of the state to force an individual to do anything."

Force Defended

In the report of Secretary of War Garrison in 1915 occurred the following:

"The necessity of a nation having force commensurate with its responsibilities is demonstrated by every correct process of reasoning founded upon facts. This is so where the subject is considered in the line of philosophy, or government, or history. The use of force is the inherent essence of government. The very term itself is explicit—government, the right of power to compel obedience to law. Where there is no force to compel such obedience, that is, government, there is anarchy."

"Opposition to the views as set forth by Secretary Garrison would be recognized as anarchism," said Mr. Reeves.

In referring to a passage in the Edward Marshall interview which the professor had chosen for the "Tribune" attorneys as showing that Henry Ford was anarchistic, Attorney Lucking asked the witness if the fact that Henry Ford favored keeping the United States out of war—which was the gist of the passage in question—stamped Henry Ford as an anarchist.

Q.—Isn't it true that many wars in the past, not all, but a majority of them, were brought on because of quarrels between rulers and the ambition, avarice and greed of rulers?

A.—I think many wars have been so brought on; I think this war was.

Q.—And that it was very foolish for the people of those countries to allow themselves to be slaughtered in such wars; you will agree to that?

A.—As we look back at it now, yes; we would say that.

Q.—Well, that is precisely the sentiment which you call anarchy in Mr. Ford, isn't it?

The question, How necessary is war? was thus discussed:

Q.—Do you regard war as necessary, professor?—a biological necessity?

A.—Not a biological necessity; no, sir.

Q.—Do you believe that war is essential to human progress?

A.—War is sometimes necessary; it is never an end, only a means.